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RUEHPL/AMEMBASSY PORT LOUIS 0522  
RUEHGP/AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE 5736  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 3502  
RUEHBK/AMEMBASSY BANGKOK 3405  
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI 8531  
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RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC  
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SUBJECT: MALDIVES HOSTS INDIAN OCEAN COUNTRIES FOR U.S. COAST  
GUARD-ORGANIZED MARITIME SECURITY CONFERENCE

REF: COLOMBO 492

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11. (SBU) Summary: In conjunction with the U.S. Coast Guard, the Government of Maldives hosted the "Partnering for a Safer Sea" conference May 19-22, at which Indian Ocean national and private maritime security and maritime industry stakeholders discussed regional security trends and issues. Official delegates from the following countries participated: Bangladesh, Comoros, India, Madagascar, Maldives, Mauritius, Oman, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. The U.S. Coast Guard conceived the conference as the inaugural event of an ongoing South Asia Regional Port Security Cooperative (SARPSO). The conference concluded with the agreement that there should be an annual SARPSO forum to discuss port security issues -- such as terrorism, illegal fishing, trafficking of drugs, weapons and persons, and piracy in the Indian Ocean region. India sought to limit the new forum's scope to port, not maritime, security. End summary.

MALDIVES PRESIDENT, USCG ADMIRAL AND  
US AMBASSADOR OPEN CONFERENCE  
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12. (U) The "Partnering for a Safer Sea Conference" May 19-22 at Sun Island Resort, Maldives, brought together over 100 participants to discuss port and maritime security issues in the Indian Ocean region, and to explore the possibility of establishing a multi-national forum to enhance maritime cooperation in the region. The main organizers of the conference were the Maldives Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Maldives Ministry of Transport and Communication;

and the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG). Embassy Colombo provided administrative and logistical support. Maldives President Gayoom, Minister of Transport and Communication Saeed, USCG Rear Admiral Craig E. Bone, and Ambassador Blake inaugurated the conference by speaking on the importance of regional cooperation and public and private partnership to address transnational maritime threats.

¶3. (SBU) U.S. Coast Guard Activities Far East, based in Japan, originated the idea for a consultative group of Indian Ocean nations after having conducted port security audits in the region in which participants frequently mentioned their lack of contact with their counterparts in the region. USCG envisioned a forum that would enable port and other maritime officials to discuss operational issues and establish contacts for sharing information and best practices. Coast Guard initially considered advancing the initiative through the South Asia Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), but decided not to do so because it wanted to include non-SAARC Indian Ocean countries.

#### NINE COUNTRIES PARTICIPATE

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¶4. (U) Conference participants included a mix of harbor masters and port authorities; customs and border control officials; and coast guard and navy officers and from Bangladesh, Comoros, India, Madagascar, Maldives, Mauritius, Oman, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Seychelles was invited but did not send representatives. International non-governmental organization representatives participated from the International Maritime Organization (IMO) and INTERPOL. Private sector participants included representatives of Dubai Ports World and Hutchison Ports Ltd. In addition to Admiral Bone and Ambassador Blake, U.S. participants included USCG International Port Security Liaison Officers, USCG Public Affairs, USCG Activities Far East, USCG Pacific Area, a US Customs and Border Protection officer, and Embassy Colombo Econoff.

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¶5. (U) Participants discussed maritime and port security issues that included piracy and armed robbery, drug and human trafficking, improving the IMO's International Ship and Port Facility Security (ISPS) code, updating security requirements for private ports and container terminals, long range tracking and surveillance, current and upcoming customs activities and regulations (such as the U.S. 9/11 act, which requires 100% screening of U.S.-bound cargo containers), and new security requirements for participating port authorities.

SARPSCO -- NOT AN ORGANIZATION, BUT A FORUM --  
TO MEET AGAIN IN 2009

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¶6. (U) The conference produced a SARPSCO Conclusions document that stated the participants' agreement that the conference was a "useful platform through which government officials and other professionals engaged in the development and implementation of measures to enhance security of ports..." and discussed issues such as piracy and armed robbery against ships, illegal trafficking of migrants, arms, drugs, illegal and unregulated fishing, and measures to enhance security of ports. The participants "agreed that the establishment of a forum" with official representation from the participating countries, private sector stakeholders, and intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations involved with port security "would be useful to enhance security of the ports" in the Indian Ocean region. The document welcomed Mauritius' intention to host a follow-up SARPSCO conference in 2009, and India's and Sri Lanka's interest in hosting future meetings.

#### INDIA INITIALLY SUSPICIOUS OF USCG ROLE

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¶7. (SBU) The Indian delegation, led by India's outspoken defense attache to Colombo, initially opposed the SARPSCO concept due to the heavy USG involvement, which they stated they were unaware of prior to their arrival. They were also opposed to the group discussing not just port, but broader maritime security issues, because, they

argued, that was the domain of navies, not civilian maritime officials. No other delegation openly opposed the U.S. role, but participants agreed to India's desire to keep the focus on ports. Almost all participants actively voiced their strong support for this conference and for the ongoing SARPSCO forum that Coast Guard envisioned. Ultimately, the IMO representative and several private stakeholders, with the encouragement of the USCG representatives, successfully persuaded the Indian delegation to sign on to the Conclusions document supporting an ongoing SARPSCO form.

¶18. (SBU) The role of the USCG at future SARPCO conferences was not addressed. USCG international port security liaison officer told EconOff tat USCG does not intend to be a lead organizer, asit was this time, in future SARPSCO events. TheUSCG role, he expected, would depend on whether the host nation and regional participants sought its involvement, and the level of support and resources provided by USCG headquarters.

¶19. (SBU) The conference was reported on Television Maldives (TVM) and in local Maldivian, Sri Lankan, and Indian press, as well as the International Herald Tribune, with most reporting essentially the content of USCG press releases. Some reports referred to SARPSCO as a new regional security "organization," as stated in Coast Guard's initial press release. Subsequent Coast Guard press releases did not repeat the incorrect reference to SARPSCO as an organization.

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COMMENT: VALUABLE FIRST STEP TOWARDS INDIAN OCEAN  
MARITIME SECURITY COOPERATION

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¶10. (SBU) The "Partnering for a Safer Sea" conference was a good first step in a valuable U.S. Coast Guard initiative. The broad participation and attendees' receptive attitudes showed that the Coast Guard was correct in perceiving a need for a regional forum for maritime security consultations and information sharing. It will be important to engage further with India to gauge the seriousness of its objections to U.S. involvement and issues beyond port security. In part, at least, the Indian defense attache was understandably reacting to not having had in advance of the conference a clear picture of the U.S. role and the envisioned scope of the forum. The Coast Guard intends to address those concerns in the course of its continuing bilateral discussions with its Indian counterparts.

¶11. (U) U.S. Coast Guard Activities Far East cleared on this cable.  
MOORE